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From: Team USSOCOM J3-I, OA4604 Wargaming Course, Naval Postgraduate School

To: Dr. J. Appleget, Senior Lecturer, Naval Postgraduate School

Subject: Executive Summary Preventing Crisis: Int'l SOF Operations in the Gray Zone

1. Purpose. The purpose of this study is to provide planning principles that the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) can use to coordinate international Special Operations Forces (SOF) partners in sustained "steady state" special operations. These initial organizing principles allow USSOCOM to shape and counter regional and trans-regional threats prior to the establishment of a coalition. USSOCOM can use these principles to analyze how to efficiently allocate resources to meet the evolving requirements of the operational environment.

2. Background. USSOCOM J3-International (J3-I) highlighted that US SOF operations in the gray zone can be augmented by an international collective. This cooperation and collaboration can gain significant effect, while being an equitable use of a decreasing force. How does the international community move away from ad hoc coalitions toward organizations, coordinating mechanisms, and systems that efficiently resource combined, steady-state operations? As one conflict winds down, another arises. Coalitions are built around a specific problem set with a political mandate, but how can international SOF coordinate outside of an established coalition?

The wargame was conducted as a board game through four two-player teams, one representing a country's senior SOF Officer and the other as the country's senior Foreign Minister. The four teams were the United States, US Ally, US Partner Country, Non-Hostile 3rd Party Country. The players were to apply 'resources' into regions that had a quantifiable level of stability or instability, in an effort to prevent a region from falling into a crisis. The game was designed so that the regions interrelated with each other, and there was inter- and intra-player friction to replicate an operating environment.

3. Analysis Methods. The study team recorded the interaction between players throughout the course of the wargame. The data collection management plan highlighted the key issues and indicators of successes and failures to answer the sponsor's objective. The game resulted in a number of findings, to which the study team derived associative principles. Upon conclusion of the wargame, the players were briefed a Quick Look Report to confirm, deny, or augment the study team's observations and the initial findings of the wargame. Finally, the study team conducted a deep dive of the data and observations to analyze the findings of the wargame and developed a final report and an out-brief to the sponsor.

OA4606

Subject: EXSUM Preventing Crisis: Int'l SOF Operations in the Gray Zone

4. Analysis Findings.

i. **Crisis prevention trumps crisis response:** USSOCOM must remain focused on crisis prevention before, during, and after a crisis. SOF planners should use a crisis planning model to conduct thorough, systematic planning before a crisis (Phase 0). Throughout the wargame, an ounce of prevention was worth a pound of cure.

ii. **Steady state operations require leadership and deliberate planning:** USSOCOM should continue to lead international partners in pursuit of agreed upon interests and priorities. USSOCOM achieved the best results when a clear, deliberate plan synchronized international partners. USSOCOM achieved less optimal results when players pursued individual priorities, which resulted in disjointed, inefficient efforts.

iii. **Relationships matter:** USSOCOM should constantly evaluate, develop, and leverage relationships in the JIIM environment. USSOCOM and the State Department must invest heavily in relationships and should specially select personnel with a goal of developing long term relationships. Throughout multiple iterations of the wargame, relationships were crucial in facilitating or hindering cooperation.

iv. **Avoid redundant efforts:** USSOCOM should continue to evaluate when ally or partner nations have redundant capabilities. Coordination needs to focus on taking advantage of existing capabilities of international SOF and how they can fit into the overall Phase 0 objectives. Throughout the wargame, nations tried to coordinate on the ground in regions with less than optimal results.

v. **Develop flexible authorities:** SOCOM must understand the challenging political environment, and the need to focus efforts on political leaders as much as military ones. Efficient application of synchronized International SOF operations in Phase 0 can be attained through a legal and authority framework that is conducive to working through SOF partners. There are instances where putting the appropriate face to an operation is better than conducting the operation unilaterally.

vi. **Competing inter-organizational and intra-national priorities must be addressed with the same level of effort as international priorities.** Teams had better results convincing others to act in their interest when both players agreed on the strategy. USSOCOM should continue to educate leaders about achieving influence in the JIIM environment.

vii. **Communicate initial organization fundamentals:** USSOCOM and International SOF commands must clearly communicate their priorities and desired end-states to one another. Defining and agreeing on objectives are critical. This will serve to identify commonalities that will form the basis of an effective partnership. Establishing

OA4606

Subject: EXSUM Preventing Crisis: Int'l SOF Operations in the Gray Zone

mechanisms that propagate unity of effort between International SOF Organizations will increase operational flexibility for emerging requirements.

5. Areas for Further Analysis.

a. Expand studies to include other organizations- NGO, JIIM. The current game is designed to facilitate the Political/ Diplomatic relationship with the Military. Future games could examine the government-NGO relationship, or an inter-agency game as well. A game that accurately captures the nuance of all of these interrelated organizations would be beyond the scope of a 3-5 hour game which was the intent of this game.

b. The effects of Information Sharing for International SOF Operations. The compounding effects of being able to openly share information and intelligence or not were beyond the scope of this initial study. Future studies should incorporate closed information methods and tools in order to simulate the effects of different intelligence pictures, as well as the effects of being able to communicate securely as military partners. Specifically, this future study can focus on the "Mission Partner Environment" communications program and its potential effects.

6. Conclusion. USSOCOM should demonstrate leadership of international Special Operations Force allies and partners to collectively synchronize efforts and resources outside of the establishment of a coalition. Facilitating multinational campaigns through a Global SOF Network will set the conditions to conduct steady state special operations. Providing a planning framework with cooperative SOF stakeholders that is crisis focused, with legal framework and authorities to minimize redundancy and maximize international SOF capability, will be critical in uniting efforts during Phase 0. International and intra-national friction that is common when planning and coordinating for SOF operations against lines of effort can be lubricated with enduring personal relationships.

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